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ABSTRACT

The United States Commissioner of Education enumerated several positive aspects of the unanticipated success of career education: Section 406, Title 4, P.L. 93-380 made career education a law of the land; career education has been appropriated its own funds; a National Advisory Council on Career Education is to be formed; and further emphasis to the movement is expected to result from a joint DHEW, Department of Commerce, and Department of Labor investigation of the relationships between education and work. Support for career education at the State and local level and from non-governmental groups is also encouraging. A significant step has been taken with the publication of the Office of Education position paper on career education containing a generic definition of career education. It is hoped that career education will be primarily a State and local matter, and that creativity in that area will be encouraged. Its quality must be improved, and its effectiveness evaluated. Work remains to be done in implementing programs, particularly at the high school level and among special groups. The State coordinators are commended for ably filling their leadership role in making career education operational. (AG)

CAREER EDUCATION IN 1974: A VIEW FROM THE COMMISSIONER'S

Desk

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by
T. H. Bell
U.S. Commissioner of Education

I hope that our physical remoteness at this moment will not detract from the closeness I feel to the career education movement. I cannot be with you in person today because of a commitment I made earlier to another very important conference here in Washington. Because of the great personal interest I have in career education, however, I requested this second best way of being with you today.

A little over three years ago, when I served in OE the first time, I had the pleasure of preparing a major policy paper on career education. In that paper I suggested several ways to bring career education to life in schools across the Nation. Your successes in making career education come alive during the past three years have far exceeded what most of us in OE, at that time, thought possible. That is one reason I regret very much that I can't thank you face-to-face today.

A second reason I feel bad about my physical absence is that 48 of the 50 States and five of the six territories are represented at your meeting by key career education staff members from State departments of education. Today marks the first time in the brief history of career education that such truly national representation of career education leadership has ever been gathered in a single place.

The potential this meeting holds for a truly national dialogue between SEA and OE professionals in career education is very great indeed. The need for the kinds of professional discussions you will be carrying on is already great and is growing greater each day.

Current Status of Career Education

About a year ago former Commissioner John Ottina published a paper describing career education as "alive and well". Today, I think it more appropriate to describe career education as "going and growing". No small thanks are due Commissioner Ottina for the positive support he gave career education in a year when Federal appropriations for career education were non-existent. Now that congress is favorably considering our request for an appropriation, I hope I can stimulate and encourage still greater efforts, nationwide, on behalf of career education.

Many encouraging and positive signs surround career education. Among those that could be mentioned, the following seem particularly significant to me:

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1. For the first time in the history of career education, we have a Congressional mandate for career education. By enacting Section 406, Title IV, P.L. 93-380, the Congress has made career education a law of the land. It is no longer simply a project of the Executive Branch of the Government.

2. For the first time in the history of career education, the Congress is favorably considering the appropriation of funds earmarked for career education. No longer should we have to rely on funds that it is only legally "permissible" to use to support career education.

3. For the first time in the history of career education, there will be a National Advisory Council on Career Education. This Council, to be appointed soon, will bring a wealth of prestige and valuable advice to the career education movement. Moreover, the law specifically charges it to make legislative recommendations to the Congress based on its study of the need for and current status of career education.

4. For the first time in the history of career education, an active inter-agency team, representing DHEW and the Departments of Commerce and Labor, is studying and making recommendations regarding relationships between education and work. This joint effort cannot help but give still more emphasis to the career education movement.

I am further encouraged by a variety of other developments. The following are especially significant:

1. Career education continues to find its greatest strength and most dramatic growth at the local level. The Council of Chief State School Officers estimates that almost 5,000 of the 17,000 school districts in the United States will have active career education programs this fall. Those who, in the past, have contended that it takes 50 years for any good idea to become common practice in American education are being proved wrong by career education. This remarkable local support for career education is its most impressive credential. It speaks loud and clear both for the viability of the career education concept and for the need for career education.

2. The increasing strength and support for career education evident at the State level is extremely encouraging also. The Council of Chief State School Officers has passed a series of strong and positive resolutions on career education. Six State legislatures have enacted career education legislation, and others are now considering it. More than half of the State boards of education have adopted policy statements supporting career education. More than three fourths of our State departments of education have appointed at least one full-time professional in career education. Support for career education by SEAs has never been stronger. It continues to grow.

3. Non-governmental groups continue to support and lend strength to career education. I was tremendously pleased to see that the National Education Association, at its 1974 convention, passed a resolution supporting career education. The support being given by the National Youth Organizations is heartwarming and very much appreciated. The Chamber of Commerce of the U.S.A. is continuing its strong and positive support.

The National Advisory Council on Vocational Education put the title "Career Education" on its recently published 8th report. The tremendous support that document gives to career education has already been helpful and is sure to be even more helpful. The recent National Conference on Career Education, conducted by the National Urban Coalition, produced a series of helpful suggestions for effective delivery of career education to minority and low income persons. Even more examples could be given, but even these few illustrate the generally positive non-governmental attitude.

4. Finally, I am pleased to announce that the Office of Education has, in the past week, adopted its own position paper on career education. I deeply appreciate the significant help that both State department of education personnel and local career education coordinators gave us on what appears to be a consensus position.

I am particularly pleased that the paper contains a generic definition of career education. While it clearly speaks to relationships between education and work, it leaves States and local school systems free to develop their own specific career education definitions. The centrality of work--both paid and unpaid--in this definition seems to me essential in expressing a set of goals consistent with both the economic and the humanistic need for work in our society today. The paper emphasizes integration within education and collaboration by the formal education system with both the business-industry-labor-professional-government community and the home and family structure. This emphasis provides us with a solid basis for career education. It is a basis that points us toward a bright future.

Challenges

My general optimism and favorable attitudes toward career education have not prevented me from recognizing a number of challenges that we should all be trying to meet now. Those that seem particularly crucial to me include:

1. We must balance Federal funding for career education with State and local initiative in ways that will continue to make career education, like all good education, primarily a State and local matter. Let us be sure that career education never becomes a massive Federal effort that in effect bribes school systems to change. The original initiative for career education came from the grass roots. It is vital that this initiative not be lost.

2. We must communicate career education expertise in ways that will enhance and stimulate local initiative and creativity rather than stifle it. One of the most valuable lessons career education has taught us is that both teachers and students are smarter, more innovative, and more creative than traditional approaches to education have allowed them to be. A second valuable lesson has been the great interest and enthusiasm of the business-labor-industry-professional-government community in joining with schools and with the home and family structure in a truly collaborative effort to make education, as preparation for work, a major goal of all who teach and all who learn. Our communications must reflect both of these lessons.

3. We must make special efforts both to improve the quality of career education and to evaluate its effectiveness. Unless we do so, the great initial enthusiasm we have seen will quickly diminish. The promises of career education are attractive, but those promises need to be backed up by results.

4. We must expand the settings in which career education operates. While it has been remarkably well received at the K-8 level, we still have much to do to make career education a reality in most senior high schools. Career education should be evident on the campus of every community college and four-year college and university in the country. Our teacher education programs need to clearly reflect the career education emphasis and point of view. There is much to do before we can say we have met this challenge.

5. Finally, we must increase our efforts to provide meaningful and effective career education to special groups--including the physically and mentally handicapped, the gifted and talented, minorities, low income persons, and females. It is eminently appropriate to emphasize that career education is for all. However, it is a major challenge to convert this promise into an effective reality.

Concluding Remarks

If I didn't sincerely believe that career education can and will meet each of these challenges, I wouldn't have stated them in this explicit fashion. Career education is the most viable vehicle for needed educational reform for the entire system of American education that has come along in many, many years. It has been forged from local needs and been built with local expertise. It has a solid framework of research knowledge coupled with practical experience. Career education is a winner. It has my full and complete support.

Finally, I want to express my appreciation to you, the State coordinators of career education, for the important leadership role you are playing in converting career education from the conceptual

to the operational stage. With your continuing efforts and the fine support you need and receive from your chief State school officers, career education's future is bright indeed.

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